



Michigan Recreation and Park Association

**Testimony of Dennis L. Schornack, Executive Director
Michigan Recreation and Park Association**

to

**Joint Meeting of the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs
Committee and the House Committee on the Great Lakes and Environment**

Regarding: SBs 388, 389 and HBs 4677, 4678

April 1, 2009

Good morning Madame Chairs and members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the State Park Passport proposal embodied in SBs 388 and 389 and HBs 4677 and 4678.

The Michigan Recreation and Park Association represents nearly 2,000 professionals who work for city, village, township and county park and recreation agencies throughout the state. Our members manage nearly 5,300 local parks and thousands of recreation facilities that are essential to local economies and the quality of life in local communities.

We strongly support the vision to establish a sustainable source of funding for state parks, boating facilities, forests, campgrounds and recreation areas. Assessing a general motor vehicle registration fee in exchange for eliminating daily and annual park entry and boating fees will make access to state recreation resources more affordable for Michigan residents and provide the resources required to address crumbling infrastructure, maintenance and operational needs.

Using general car and motorcycle registrations as a means to support state recreation resources makes sense because we get to those resources by driving, and broadening the base for this regulatory fee will enable a lower, more affordable rate for the average citizen to access these public assets. The opportunity to enjoy outdoor recreation will be enhanced for all Michigan citizens.

Some say that the proposed legislation violates Article IX, Section 9 of the Michigan Constitution that dedicates vehicle fees to roads, but this section also makes an exception for "regulatory fees." A key feature of regulatory fees is their voluntary nature, and the "opt-out" provision in this legislation clearly makes it voluntary.

We also respectfully note that 15 colleges and universities and 4 special funds currently use this mechanism to raise money. What works for them can work for state parks, and we are confident that the proposal passes constitutional muster.

Local recreation resources complement state-owned resources and similarly suffer from a shortage of funding. The primary state source of development funding for local parks is the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund which on average provides approximately \$4 million per year in matching grants to local units of government.

We strongly support the proposal to, on average, nearly double the amount of development funding for local parks by allocating 10% of the net revenues to local units of government for this purpose. Using the familiar Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund application process to distribute these revenues is convenient and efficient.

These comments are made to generally indicate the views of the Michigan Recreation and Park Association. Our Public Policy Committee will meet on April 15, 2009 to conduct a more detailed examination of the legislation, establish a formal position, and recommend amendments, if any.

I anticipate that the following concerns may arise during our deliberations:

- 1) Anticipated revenues rely on an expectation public “good will” towards state parks. In that regard, Michigan citizens have consistently demonstrated their solid support for state parks at the ballot box, and we are reasonably confident that a voluntary fee will capture sufficient good will to produce sustainable revenues.
- 2) Paying .5% of gross revenues for administration to the Secretary of State is too much given the simplicity and ease of administration contemplated by the proposal. How much does it cost to change a form?
- 3) Finally, several local parks that charge vehicle entry fees are located in close proximity to state parks that, under the proposal, will not charge entry fees. Competition for “day users” may result in revenue losses for these local parks.

We understand that this is an initial hearing on the legislation and that there will be future opportunities to respond in greater detail.

Thank you.